

# India: Kolkata students and workers demand freedom for Assange and Manning

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Indian supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) have won broad support for WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange and whistle blower Chelsea Manning amongst workers and students in Kolkata, West Bengal. The Indian Trotskyists are holding a public meeting in the state capital on September 15 in defence of Assange and Manning.

On September 1, the ICFI supporters held a successful public meeting in Sriperumbudur about 40 kilometres from Chennai, capital of Tamil Nadu state, to demand the immediate release of these courageous individuals. It was addressed by Deepal Jayasekera, assistant secretary of Sri Lanka's Socialist Equality Party (SEP), Arun Kumar from the ICFI Supporters Group and chaired by Shibu Vavara. Jayasekera will address the forthcoming Kolkata event.

The meetings are part of the ICFI/WSWS campaign to secure the freedom of Assange and Manning who have exposed the war crimes of the US and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan and other illegal activities by governments around the world. The ICFI/WSWS has called for the building of a Global Defence Committee campaign to defend these heroic individuals.

In Kolkata campaigners spoke to Jadavpur University students and workers from BSNL, a state-owned telecommunication company.

Jadavpur University students denounced the US and British governments and voiced their solidarity with Assange and Manning. Several students compared their persecution with the Modi government's dictatorial lockdown of Jammu and Kashmir and its anti-democratic abolition of the state's semi-autonomous status.

Sumita, who studies Political Science in Jadavpur University, said: "The arrest of Assange and Manning

is a blot on democracy. The complete curtailing of their freedom by keeping them in detention, along with blocking their ability to prepare their legal cases or make sufficient contact with a lawyer, coupled with the mental torture, is a shame for human rights today.

"The silence of the top media in different countries about this matter and the continuous vilification of Assange," she continued, was indicative of fascistic tendencies in governments around the world.

"The US and its administration know that if the 'truth' as revealed by Assange is accepted, it will create a new history of Iraq War and other events." The US will "have to take responsibility" for civilian deaths, she said, instead of attempting to justify them as "collateral damage."

Sumita concluded: "We must collectively condemn these increasing illiberal and inhumane attacks before it is too late. Let the saying 'Speak the truth and the truth shall set you free' be upheld this time. Something Plato once said applies to Assange: 'No one is hated more than he who speaks the truth.'"

Animesh, a student, supported the ICFI/WSWS campaign: "I think this is a really great move to raise our voice against those people [persecuting Assange and Manning]. I hope more people join this campaign and make the movement stronger and secure the freedom of Assange and Manning."

Sandip was enthusiastic about Assange's courageous exposure of imperialist war crimes: "We have to support Julian [Assange]. Why are these governments doing this to him? I think everyone has the right to free speech and shouldn't be pushed back. Free Julian Assange at all costs. We support your campaign."

ICFI supporters campaigned at BSNL employees' homes in Kolkata where they met Gopal, a Jadavpur Baghajatin High School student. He voiced his support

for the defence of Assange and Manning and spoke out against the attacks on freedom of speech.

A BSNL worker, who wanted to remain anonymous, fearing reprisals from authorities, also welcomed the ICFI campaigners. “Freedom of speech is a pillar of a true democracy but if governments can suppress journalists like Julian Assange and stop them from speaking the truth then it’s a massive threat to democracy,” he said.

The BSNL worker denounced the Modi government’s privatisation of government-owned public sector units and told ICFI campaigners about the BSNL workers’ grievances, which ranged from the overdue salary payments of permanent workers, poor conditions of contract workers, and the poor living conditions and rundown state of allotted housing for BSNL workers.



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